

VZCZCXRO4904

RR RUEHAG RUEHAST RUEHBI RUEHCI RUEHDBU RUEHDF RUEHIK RUEHLH RUEHLN
RUEHLZ RUEHNEH RUEHPW RUEHROV RUEHRS RUEHVK RUEHYG
DE RUEHAH #0315/01 0690908
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 100908Z MAR 09
FM AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 2436
INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE
RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE
RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 4912
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 2675
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 2540
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 3156
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 3375
RHMFIUU/CDR USCENCOM MACDILL AFB FL
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ASHGABAT 000315

SENSITIVE

SIPDIS

STATE FOR SCA/CEN, SCA/PPD, EUR/ACE, DRL
AID/W FOR EE/EA

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [EAID](#) [SOCI](#) [KDEM](#) [TX](#)

SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: INSTITUTE OF DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS OPENS
DOOR TO DIALOGUE ON DIFFICULT ISSUES

REF: 08 ASHGABAT 1486

11. (U) Sensitive but unclassified. Not for public Internet.

12. (SBU) SUMMARY: During an introductory meeting with the Charge on March 9, Institute for Democracy and Human Rights (IDHR) Director, Shirin Ahmedova, highlighted the "positive and constructive" relations it enjoyed with USAID and said that one of the Institute's key roles is to contribute to the passage of laws that conform to international standards. The Charge explained the workings of the U.S. Helsinki Commission and encouraged contact between IDHR and the Commission in the future. Through an interagency working group, the IDHR is working to reform the prison code, but does not specifically work on conditions in prisons, which, instead, fall under the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Similarly, IDHR addresses Trafficking in Persons (TIP) issues indirectly through its participation in an interagency commission, and Ahmedova noted that Turkmenistan adopted a special law on human trafficking in 2007. Recognizing the importance of having an interlocutor to discuss specific human rights-related cases, Ahmedova accepted Charge's suggestion that he bring such questions from U.S. organizations to IDHR. Closing by stating, "We're on a path of reform," Ahmedova hoped that the areas discussed can be addressed in the future. END SUMMARY.

13. (SBU) Ahmedova opened the March 9 introductory meeting with the Charge by delivering an overview of the Institute's activities. She described its cooperation with international organizations, including UN agencies, local Embassies and USAID. Characterizing the relationship with USAID as "positive and constructive," she explained the three current areas of joint work: improving existing legislation on public associations (i.e., NGOs), religious organizations, and mass media. Its extensive work with UN agencies included reforms of Turkmenistan's electoral system, as well as issues related to gender, child labor and juvenile justice. In cooperation with UK and German specialists, IDHR was improving the penitentiary system through a new criminal code. It also worked with the British Embassy on a project to better systematize the way the Complaints Commission handles citizens' complaints. (Ref A)

INSTITUTE HAS NO CONTACT WITH THE HELSINKI COMMISSION

¶4. (SBU) Charge asked whether the Institute had any contact with the United States Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (Helsinki Commission). Although she did not seem to be familiar with the Commission as described, Ahmedova showed great interest in the fact that a recent Library of Congress-supported Open World program delegation, which included members of Turkmenistan's Parliament, met with the Helsinki Commission in Washington. Charge briefly explained the committee structure and encouraged future contact between the Helsinki Commission and Turkmenistan's Mejlis and the Institute.

INSTITUTE FOCUSED ON REFORMING PRISON CODE - NOT CONDITIONS

¶5. (SBU) In response to Charge's question about the Institute's work on prison conditions, Ahmedova said the current law dated to the 1960s, and a current Institute aim was to reform the law. Direct oversight for prison conditions, however, lies with Ministry of Internal Affairs, not the Ministry of Justice. An interagency commission that includes the above-mentioned entities had studied EU prison laws. The Institute's role was to help develop a code that conforms to standards of international conventions.

PLAYS AN INDIRECT ROLE IN HUMAN TRAFFICKING

¶6. (SBU) Ahmedova said the Institute did not directly work on Trafficking in Persons (TIP) issues, but it participated in the legislative reform process. In recent seminars on human trafficking, the State Migration Service and Ministry of Internal Affairs organized the events, and IDHR joined as a participant. Ahmedova noted that Turkmenistan adopted a special law on human

ASHGABAT 00000315 002.2 OF 002

trafficking in 2007, which she mentioned before the December 2008 Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review (UPR).

¶7. (SBU) As part of the UPR process, bringing legislation into conformity with international conventions and the recommendations of treaty bodies was a primary task for the Institute. After being "very passive" previously, this process had become more active over the past year. On the rights of women and children, Ahmedova stated that Turkmenistan was party to a number of international standards, including on child labor and the Convention on Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Future plans included a prohibition of torture and expanding other civil and political rights. Turkmenistan also ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Acknowledging that she was on the "hot seat" during the UPR discussions, Charge complimented Ahmedova for her performance in Geneva.

CHARGE: REVISED LEGISLATION NEEDS PROPER IMPLEMENTATION

¶8. (SBU) Charge said that it seemed IDHR's goal was to provide the basis for further reforms through legislation. Although this was viewed favorably by the USG, he also stressed the importance of implementation. USG interlocutors have received very little information in response when they raise specific cases of human rights violations with Turkmen Government officials. To Charge's inquiry about the IDHR's role in individual cases, Ahmedova said it receives letters from citizens, and can forward these on to the Supreme Court and Prosecutor General. Acknowledging the importance of having an interlocutor to discuss specific human rights-related cases, Ahmedova accepted Charge's suggestion that he bring such questions from U.S. organizations to IDHR.

¶9. (SBU) COMMENT: IDHR will have its plate full orchestrating an array of legislative reform initiatives with numerous international partners, including USAID-funded projects to revise the Laws on Religious Organizations and Mass Media. In addition, Director Ahmedova expressed willingness to conduct a dialogue on specific human rights cases. If IDHR is able to follow-through on such reforms and effectively address human rights concerns, it will represent a real commitment on the part of the Turkmenistan Government to advance reform in this area. END COMMENT.

MILES